

Tahoe embraces food service products made from plants

By Kathryn Reed

Just as businesses were getting accustomed to recycling and using recycled products, compostable is a word and practice that is being thrown at them.

C&M Food Distributors in Reno is helping Lake Tahoe businesses make the switch.

“We show small businesses they can do what big businesses do. It can be done and it can be profitable, too, for everybody,” Tee Branch of C&M said of using compostable products.



Compostable products from C&M Foods that Embassy Suites Lake Tahoe uses.

Photo/Provided

Branch, who lives in the South Lake Tahoe, is the sales rep handling the entire basin and Truckee for C&M.

They have 37 items to choose from and the list keeps growing. Toilet paper and facial tissue are the two most popular items. Branch said this is because every business needs them and the

cost is comparable to other brands.

All of C&M's compostable products are from plant material.

Branch said C&M has stayed away from products made from corn and sugar because of how they are traded on the commodity market and therefore subject to price fluctuations.

It used to be that Sacramento tomato processing plants burned their natural waste to get rid of it. Now it's turned into plates, cups, flatware and other items that businesses can use.

Traditional paper products are made from petroleum. When the consumer is done with the plate or flatware it ends up in their trash and eventually hauled to a landfill.

Using the items made of plant matter or other compostable products means it will be turned into a soil amendment. It's part of the cradle-to-gravel movement where what happens at the end of a product's life is just as important as its birth, or how it was manufactured. Composting is also part of the zero waste movement – meaning nothing ends up in the garbage. It is either recycled or composted.

Kirkwood Mountain Resort and Embassy Suites South Lake Tahoe are two of Branch's biggest buyers of the compostable products.

"We use their cups, a lot of their paper goods and their food trays," said Kelly Groover, food and beverage administrative manager at Kirkwood. "I think it's very important now to people. To a lot of homeowners out here it's important to them."

That's the other thing businesses are finding; their customers are asking what they are doing to be green.

The ski resort separates its compostable products into a dumpster that ACES Waste Services picks up.

C&M has a mix of small and large customers in the Lake Tahoe area. Some of the other businesses using compostable products are Granlibakken, McP's Pub, Driftwood Café, Fresh Ketch, Lakeside Inn and Casino, and Stateline Brewery.

Branch said he talking to many other businesses, including the school districts and Barton Memorial Hospital.

"C&M Foods is the cheapest. As we get more businesses on board is will lower all of our costs," said David Hansen with Embassy Suites.

His hotel has been using the products for more than a year. With breakfast served each morning and a cocktail hour in the evening, plenty of plates, cups, napkins and other food service products are used each day.

Having worked in kitchens most of his life, Branch understands the cost issues as well as the need to educate workers about composting. He said the only item that hasn't successfully been developed is a coffee lid from plant matter. Coffee cups are OK. The problem is the lid then needs to go in one bin and the cup in another.

The other thing C&M boasts about is 98 percent of its compostable products are made in the United States. This then reduces the carbon footprint even more. However, no one in the States is making compostable plates or to-go containers.

Publisher's note: *On March 31 read Lake Tahoe News to find out what Full Circle Compost is all about.*